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ABSTRACT

English instruction is successful when students learn to express significant ideas clearly in discussions, write with verve and grace, read with insight and enjoyment, and practice these skills beyond the realm of the classroom. This report discusses how to teach grammar and select literature in order to achieve those goals. Research and issues in grammar teaching are reviewed. Grammar learning is enhanced in active language environments that use techniques such as role-playing and sentence combining, while attending to grammar concerns primarily within the writing process. The following types of "literature" should be included in the curriculum: (1) a wide range of works for all ages: (2) popular literature; (3) great classical and contemporary literature; (4) nonprint media such as television, film, and drama; (5) students' personal experience; and (6) information about literature (authors' lives, particular works, literary movements, figures of speech, metric patterns, etc.). The latter, though emphasized in the past, should be approached more as a tool than as an end in itself and should be subordinate to higher order thinking skills and students' responses to characters and events in a work. Since nonprint media provide students' most frequent vicarious experience, the English teacher has an important stake in guiding their understanding of the imaginative worlds presented there. A list of references is included. (PS)

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Two Problems in the Teaching of English

By

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TWO PROBLEMS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Charles Suhor
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Two major issues within the scope of the ERIC/RCS Clearinghouse are teaching grammar and defining the content of the English curriculum. In this analysis of these problems, the views are one educator's perspective, but the ideas are rooted in theory and research.

Teaching Grammar

A favorite teachers' lounge story concerns an English teacher who substituted for a friend at a bridge game. The pre-game conversation was casual enough until someone asked the newcomer, "Well, Bob, what do you do for a living?" When Bob said he was an English teacher at Central High School, an icy lull settled in the room. "Well," someone finally volunteered, "Whom deals?"

Few subjects have generated more social anxiety, academic debate, and outright anger than grammar. The common rationale for teaching grammar is that a person cannot speak or write well without knowledge of formal grammar. Moreover, study of the structure of language--from parts of speech to phrases and clauses to paragraph structure to essays and longer works--seems essential to the education of a well-rounded person.

But, on the whole, neither the traditional study of school grammar nor the introduction of new grammars into schools has succeeded in making America a nation of skilled speakers and writers. In fact, the problem of teaching grammar as a means of improving communication skills has increased with our nation's commitment to universal education. The Education Commission of the States (n.d.) notes that in 1920 an elite 10% of the population was in school By 1980, some 80% of our children were graduating from high school.

As we strive for true inclusiveness in American education, we reach out to more diverse language communities--to students with varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It will not do to point to brilliant exceptions --individuals from poverty backgrounds and from nonstandard dialect environments who "made it" despite difficult odds. If we really intend to help most students to become articulate speakers and writers, we must either find better methods of teaching grammar or seek out other ways to improve students' abilities to speak and write.

The strategy in outlining this problem and suggesting solutions will be to define some basic terms--grammar (including traditional grammar, new grammar, and school grammar), standard English usage, and communicative competence--and use those terms to provide a brief historical perspective and explain why grammar has been controversial among scholars, teachers, and educational reformers. Then research on grammar instruction will be discussed. Finally,

this section will suggest future directions for the teaching of grammar, taking into account various elements in the controversy.

Definitions and Issues

The term "grammar" as used by language scholars refers to a body of knowledge about the structure of language. For most grammarians, grammar refers to sounds in language and the structure of words and sentences. The grammarian's scholarly role is to describe language and how it is generated, not to prescribe ways in which people should talk or write. In elementary and secondary schools, grammar instruction has always had a prescriptive goal--improving students' speech and writing. But of course, it makes sense to expect that prescriptive instruction should be based on a sound scholarly description of language.

Grammar scholars have long noted that "school grammars" are based on oversimplified, inaccurate, or outmoded views of the English language. Considerable pressure has existed over the years to change textbooks, elementary and secondary curricula, and teacher training programs to reflect deeper insights into the nature of English. The pressure peaked when adaptations of the "new grammars," such as structural and transformational grammar, were introduced into many books and programs in the 1960's and 1970's, with sentence slots and branching tree diagrams augmenting or replacing traditional grammar instruction.

The new approaches were not well received by most teachers. The concepts in the new grammars, besides being unfamiliar, were frequently much more abstract (even in their inevitably simplified form) than the already complicated school grammars derived from traditional grammar. Consequently, the sophisticated new grammars seemed ill-suited to the teacher's goal of using grammar study prescriptively to improve students' speech and writing. Further, the scholarly debates among linguists moved from traditional vs. structural vs. transformational grammar into new realms of revised transformational approaches, generative semantics, and a host of other candidate theories for more accurate description of language.

The term "functional grammar" and phrases such as "eclectic approaches" came to mean school grammars that selectively used concepts and terms from old and new grammars, always with a dual goal: (a) giving students information about the nature of language while (b) improving their speaking and writing. This double intention, deeply embedded in English programs in elementary and secondary schools, is crucial. As will be seen later, many teachers are claiming today that the first goal--knowledge of formal grammar--can actually hinder the goal of improving students' language skills.

The second goal was challenged in fundamental ways two decades ago and is being viewed in a new light today. To understand why anyone would attack the idea of improving communication skills, we must return briefly to some definitions and history. The fact is, improvement of students' language skills has historically meant extreme emphasis on one aspect of

school grammar--namely, standard English usage. The term "standard English usage" refers to features of a particular dialect of English--namely, the spoken dialect generally shared by middle class speakers in America. The term will also be used here to refer to the conventions of writing represented in edited American English. In common parlance, standard English is what most people refer to as "good grammar" or "correct speaking and writing." See Wolfram and Christian (1979) for a lucid, more detailed explanation of dialects.

Few issues in American education divide the scholar from the general public more dramatically than that of standard English usage. Professional grammarians, working from a descriptive viewpoint, have discovered that nonstandard dialects of English have a coherence and order that is different from the coherence and order of standard English. For example, linguistic analysis has shown the interior logic and subtlety of use of the verb "be" in black dialect. The sentence "he bes my brother" does not follow the rules of subject/verb agreement and other uses of "be" in descriptions of standard English grammars; but it follows a systematic set of rules within the structure of black English. From a descriptive viewpoint, neither black nor standard English is "right." The two are merely different.

The dialect issue became most divisive during the neoprogressive movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the descriptive viewpoint of the scholarly grammarian was used as part of a moral argument against the teaching of standard English usage. Since each dialect of English has its own structural integrity and is a sufficient vehicle for communication, the reformers argued, the imposition of standard English on all students through the schools is an unwarranted linguistic imperialism (Sledd, 1969).

The debate was often complex and usually bitter. At a 1966 convention session of the National Council of Teachers of English, a speaker recommended that the organization disband, because its work was essentially the oppression of linguistic minorities. But the most radical pro-dialect reformers eventually lost ground, for several reasons. First, it became clear that their moral position simply was not widely shared. Parents in nonstandard dialect-speaking communities generally wanted their children to have the opportunity to learn standard English usage. Second, the profession at large moved towards a better understanding of the descriptive viewpoint. Teachers held to their mission to teach prescriptively, but they moved towards (or were forced towards, as in the Ann Arbor, Michigan case) understanding student dialect variations. Instead of stigmatizing and trying to eradicate the language of the student's nurture, teachers presented standard usage as alternative language forms to be used in particular social situations.

This moderate view is consistent with the sociolinguistic concept of "communicative competence" (Rubin & Kantor, 1984)--that is, students should be given a large repertoire of language strategies and should know what kinds of language conventions are appropriate in various social situations. And because standard English is one important element in getting on in the marketplace, standard oral language and edited American English are an essential part of English instruction.

To summarize this section: scholarly grammars (traditional, structural, transformational, or others) have long been debated among professional grammarians. Simplified versions called school grammars (many of them eclectic or functional) have often reflected scholarly debate but have maintained the dual goals of teaching students about the structure of language (describing language) and improving their speaking and writing (prescribing how language can be better used). The latter goal has mainly emphasized one aspect of grammar, namely, teaching standard English usage. A major challenge to standard English usage instruction during the late 1960s and early 1970s was based on the idea that dialects of American English are equally valid. The point of equal linguistic validity can be (and among many teachers, has been) acknowledged, but the teaching of standard English has generally been reaffirmed on other grounds. Students must have communicative competence--ability to make use of different language styles in different social situations. Acquiring key aspects of standard English is a useful skill in many situations in our society.

Research in the Teaching of Grammar

This section will deal first with long-range research reviews on the question of whether formal grammar study helps to improve student writing. Then it will discuss recent research that throws new light on both the content and methods of teaching grammar and usage. The research review will include some of the implications of research findings for grammar instruction, and so it will set the stage for the final directions.

The long-range research reviews on grammar instruction in relation to writing improvement are both surprising and compelling. Typically, historical reviews of research are inconclusive. They are like a Rorschach that allows the researcher and the reader to take whatever meaning they like from the data. But independent reviews of 20th century research on the relationship between knowledge of formal grammar and writing skill were conducted by John Mellon and Steve Sherwin in 1969. Remarkably, neither found a single study that supports the idea that knowledge of formal definitions and rules of grammar will, in itself, improve student writing. The same conclusion was reached in the Braddock review of 1963. Another approach to analyzing research was taken by George Hillocks in 1986. Using the technique called meta-analysis (a quantitative method that differs from traditional research reviews), Hillocks found that formal grammar instruction was least effective as a means of improving writing when compared to instructional methods such as inquiry, study of writing models, and sentence combining.

Although Mellon's and Sherwin's reviews shocked the profession, they were consistent with other bodies of knowledge about how children learn. The theory and research of psychologist Jean Piaget suggest that the abstract terminology and complex relationships involved in school grammar study are beyond the conceptual range of most students. If Piaget's stages of development accurately reflect normal intellectual growth, we cannot expect the majority of elementary and high school students to grasp and assimilate into their writing dense concepts like participial phrase, gerund, and nonrestrictive adjective clause.

Research in language development has also revealed that by the age of five--which is to say, by kindergarten age--all normal children are already using participial phrases, gerunds, nonrestrictive adjective clauses, and almost every other syntactic structure that adult speakers use. Children do not, of course, use complex structures as frequently as adults, nor do they combine the structures in as many ways when they spin out ideas in oral or written language. Nevertheless, the basics of English sentence structure are within the repertoire of the child--learned through intuitive and informal means in the home and other presechool environments.

Given the undeniable skill and appetite for natural language learning demonstrated by small children; given the Piagetian backdrop which characterizes full abstract reasoning as beginning in the early teen years; and given a massive body of experimental research demonstrating that formal grammar instruction has not helped most students to write more skillfully, it is no wonder that longstanding commonsense notions about the need for formal grammar study have been challenged. The systematic prsentation of abstract information about language begins in school grammar programs around grade 3 and continues through grade 12. It appears that the net effect for most students is to make them feel powerless before the complexities of human language--before the very structures they learned without formal instruction as preschoolers and use in conversation on an everyday basis.

Small wonder, too, that the challenge is upsetting to many teachers. To begin with, the teaching of abstractions about language was the main technique that most teachers inherited for the teaching of oral and written language. Moreover, many English teachers were undoubtedly the exceptions--the individuals who enjoyed studying grammar and perhaps profited from it in our school years. Personal experience, however exceptional, seems powerfully generalizable to the individual. So we brought to the teaching of grammar more credence than was warranted.

Some comfort and some direction are provided by other pertinent research. For example, we now know that when students write they employ fewer nonstandard usages than when they speak, apparently sensing the need for more formal language. Students also sense the need for versatility in language when they change social environments. The range and number of nonstandard usages decreases as they go from the playground to the classroom. Finally, student writing samples on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests show that the primary problems of student writing are far more basic than those of mastering standard usage and mechanics. Rather, students have difficulty developing their ideas logically and making connections between ideas in ways that reflect clear thinking and communicate intended meanings. Aside from the fact that expansive school grammar programs are intimidatingly abstract, then such programs fail to focus on specific student usage problems and distract us from the core problem of writing as coherent development of ideas.

If formal grammar study has not significantly helped students to write, why study grammar at all? Two quite different arguments for formal grammar instruction remain. The first is that students should learn grammar even if

it does not improve their speaking and writing. Every educated adult should know the parts of speech and the basic array of structures that constitute the sentences of the English language.

The argument is reasonable in terms of general education, but it does not justify the teaching of grammatical terms and structures beginning in elementary grades and continuing through college. Grammar as a liberal arts study is similar to, say, the study of music appreciation through analysis of basic musical forms, structural elements, and theory. The difference is that we do not embed analytical study of music into the K-12 curriculum, nor do we expect that knowledge about musical forms, structure, and theory will be the primary element in improving musical performance.

Arguably, liberal arts units of instruction in the nature of language and the structure of English might be included in grades 11 or 12. Even stronger reasons exist for language courses at the college level, where students who have matured sufficiently to deal with abstractions might gain a deeper understanding of language. And certainly the general education of prospective elementary and high school teachers should include the study of language. Intensive study of one or more formal systems of grammar should be a requirement for English and language arts specialists (Wolfe, 1986).

A second rationale for some study of grammatical terminology is the "common vocabulary" argument. It seems both counterintuitive and dogmatic to insist that no terminologies be used in the discussion of student writing. There are degrees of abstraction in formal grammar, and the use of simple terminology seems helpful at the high school level in straightforward discussion of concepts like active and passive verbs, lack of pronoun reference, and tense shift. The unsolved problem of pedagogy and research is this: how to find a manageable array of terms for a common vocabulary without moving towards annual coverage of innumerable abstractions. The problem with functional grammars and eclectic approaches was that they tended to stretch into full-fledged alternative versions of school grammars, embracing expansive and intensive conceptual study. The determination of what is truly functional was blurred by the teachers' aesthetic sense of grammar as a system; so students have been plunged again and again into "common vocabularies" of uncommon difficulty. (The question of the role of information in the English curriculum will be discussed under the heading "Content of the English Curriculum.")

How Should Grammar be Taught in the Future?

Up to this point, the focus has been on the primary importance of teaching students to speak and write more effectively. The weight of theory, research, and the common experience of English teachers is heavily against school grammar programs that are conceived as extensive teaching of information about language. One could hedge a bit on this statement in wondering about the need for a common vocabulary--something far less than another school version of a grammatical system, but use of some terminology to furnish an information base and conceptual glue for other kinds of instruction. So far the other kinds of instruction have only been hinted

at, so this section will focus on possible future directions for the teaching of grammar. The views presented here are just one research-based outlook, of course. If interpretations of research are an invitation to controversy, then extrapolations are risky business. Still, the inventive leap from theory and research to practice must be made. What follows is an effort in that direction.

In general, grammar instruction in the future should take place within classrooms that are active language environments. If research tells us that it is unproductive to ask students to sit at their desks quietly labeling sentence parts, common sense tells us that language growth will come only when students are actively giving shape to their thoughts through oral and written language. An active language environment is a setting or context for significant learning of many aspects of grammar, from standard English dialect to punctuating various kinds of structures within sentences.

Role-playing activities are an attractive way of placing usage study within an active classroom environment. When students imaginatively place themselves in the roles of individuals from various aspects of society--school principals, store clerks, parents, personnel directors, peers, small children, and others--they make use of their own growing communicative competence, their sense of how different people use different kinds of language in various settings. Discussion of language choices can follow the role-playing activities. For example, if students use slang expressions or nonstandard verb forms during a mock job interview and while role-playing a conversation with a younger brother or sister, the class critique can be directed towards the proper settings for formal and informal language. Discussion of dialects in literary selections is another way of making students aware of the social implications of language styles.

Attending to grammar concerns within writing process instruction is a major development in contemporary English programs. It is no accident that "proofreading"--making corrections in usage, capitalization, mechanics, and so on--is a later step in writing process models of instruction. In the model below (Suhor, 1983), note that purpose and audience are contexts that govern the entire process, and student interaction occurs at various points in pre-writing and revision.

Grammatical and usage-related points are often among those raised in the revision stage as well. The teacher (or other students) might say, "All of your sentences are short and choppy in that paragraph. Would it read more smoothly if you combined some of them?" "Isn't your last sentence in a different tense from the ones before it?" "I can't tell where you're using the character's exact words. Where do you want to put quotation marks?"

This is not to say that incidental mention of grammatical concerns will effect solid learning of sentence variety, tense, or quotation marks. Additionally, the teacher's observation of students' actual oral and written language forms the basis for diagnostic and prescriptive instruction. For

Table III-1

STAGES IN WRITING PROCESS INSTRUCTION

P	Prewriting	Drafting	Revising	Proofreading	Product	A
	--Brainstorming	--With the benefit of previous thought, talk, notes, activities	--With feedback-- peer reaction, teacher reaction, self-assessment	--Mechanics, spelling, etc.		U
U	--Discussion (with peers and teachers)-- refining and organizing ideas					D
R						I
P						E
O	--Note-taking during the above					N
S	--Sample essays					C
E						E

instance, it is clear that in any given 10th grade class, every student will not need to go through sentence drills on 10 or 12 uses of the comma. By observing students' writings, the teacher identifies problems that merit general attention, those to be worked on by small groups of students, and those requiring individual attention. Specific drills can be prescribed for students who show particular needs, without making the study of grammatical and compositional terms and rules the center of the English program.

An approach to teaching sentence structures while bypassing the abstractions of formal grammar was developed in the early 1970s. In sentence combining, students actually work with and operate on sentences to create varied structures without learning terminologies. Although based largely on out-of-context exercises and derived from complex transformational grammar theory, sentence combining is a simple technique. It draws directly on the student's innate sense of how language works. It demonstrates that students need not know, definitionally, what a participial phrase or nonrestrictive adjective clause is in order to create such structures. Most important, students who do sentence-combining drills and exercises incorporate varied sentence elements more frequently and more richly into their writing. Sentence combining has been widely researched in the last decade at all educational levels, with overwhelmingly positive results (Strong, in press).

The matter of teaching by drill warrants some frank attention here. Unhappiness with grammar-centered, drill-oriented language programs has resulted in a total opposition to drill and practice among some English specialists. Resistance to drill is understandable in light of the historical overuse of drill sheets, workbooks, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and compendious grammar handbooks. But the anti-drill position is too often held with the force of ideology. "Mindless" becomes the automatic adjective for drills, with no acknowledgment of the utility of diagnostic/prescriptive approaches or sentence-combining instruction. Powerful positive research on error diagnosis in the tradition of Shaughnessy(1977) and on sentence combining is dismissed either because of a priori assumptions about the effectiveness of whole language learning or because of unresolved questions such as longevity of effect. Parallels to out-of-context drills in other areas (such as music and athletics) are ignored in the ideological commitment to learning in natural settings.

The present state of knowledge about ways of teaching of grammar, then, points to directions that will please neither those who advocate extensive grammar instruction nor those who are doctrinally opposed to drill. Far less information is needed in the English program than was formerly supposed; and varied language activities, linked with process instruction and geared to students' needs, constitute the best applications of scholarly knowledge to classroom grammar instruction. Of course, grammar is but one part of the discipline of English. A larger question is what constitutes the range of the content area and how content relates to process.

Content of the English Curriculum

Every few years, English specialists ask themselves "What is English?" The question is not a frivolous one but a sign of continuing self-criticism and an acknowledgment of change. Questions of identity are in fact common in various subject areas, from physical education to ecology (or is it from "movement science" to "environmental studies"?). In discussions of English instruction, there is a great temptation to bypass questions of content and talk only about methodology or learning processes. This exploration deals with connections between content and processes, but it focuses mainly on the "English" in "English instruction."

English as Content (Knowing) and as Process (Doing)

Advocates of process-based instruction might argue that the question "What is the content of English?" is loaded to begin with, and perhaps unanswerable as stated. They hold that English is not a content subject to begin with, but a process subject. English is not essentially something students learn about, but something they do. The old model of English as a tripod--with mutually supporting and converging "legs" consisting of literature, composition, and grammar (Figure III-1)--fails to make this process-content distinction.

Literature and grammar are indeed substantive content areas--relatively definable bodies of scholarly knowledge--while composition is predominantly a process, or some might say a developmental skill. So the truer theoretical representation would be a "bipod" of two substantive legs with a composition component somehow nailed on (Figure III-2).

Of course, that is a pretty shaky visual model. And in fact, English curricula which treat composition as an adjunct to grammar and literature are not very serviceable. As was noted earlier in this chapter, there is slim justification for teaching grammar as a body of knowledge if a main goal of the English program is to improve oral and written language performance of elementary and high school students.

It helps a little, but not much, to substitute "language" for "grammar" on the tripod. The result then is that literature is the sole content area, with language and composition as processes to be tagged on somehow. Literature-centered English programs are often imbalanced in precisely that way. Students are limited to speaking and writing about vicarious experiences. The personal experiences of the students, and the potential of language for helping them organize and understand those experiences, are neglected. The visual analog for such a program, terrible to contemplate, might be a literature "unipod," with splinters or some such to represent the particular skills and information needed for improving oral and written language. Obviously, the whole tripod metaphor gets out of hand here; let us go on to something else.

A view of English that favors process instruction is the idea of the four language arts--listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But this

FIGURE 2

English as a Bipod

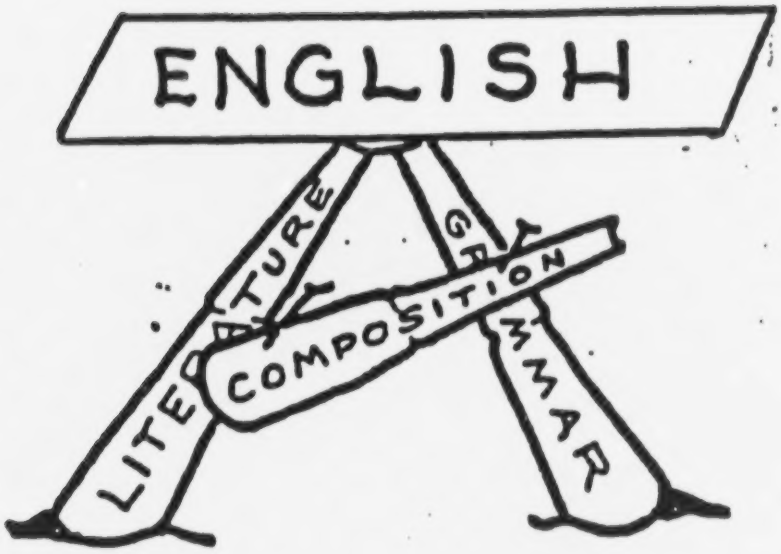
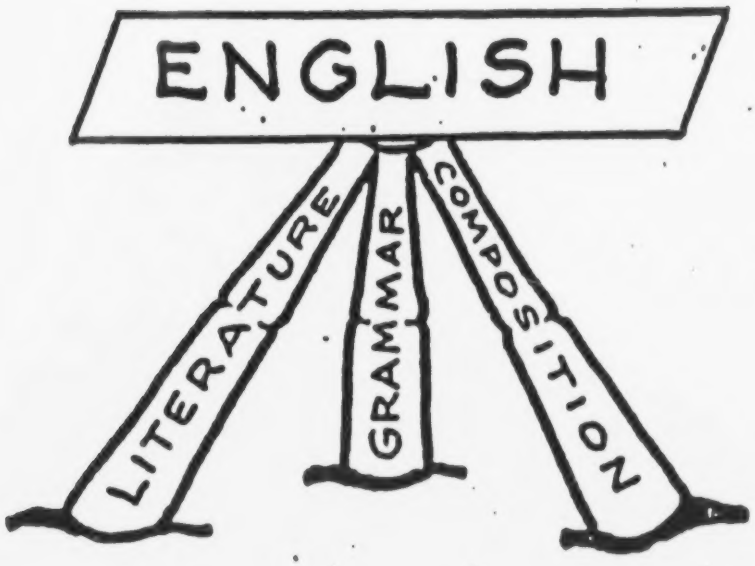


FIGURE 1

English as a Tripod



processed-based conception, in itself, provides few clues to content. What are the students listening to? What should they be speaking and writing about? And what in the world are they reading? It is too easy to waffle on these questions by emphasizing process and saying that the content of English need not be specified as long as the processes are being nurtured.

Traditionalists do not find questions of content--i.e., of that-which-is-to-be-processed--hard to answer. There is an acknowledged core of great literature, they say, from works for children to adult classics. There are universal themes and important issues and values that can be identified as central to the human condition. Such matters are certainly worthy subjects for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We need only look to the best in our cultural heritage and then find appropriate places for this content in the English curriculum, K-12. Advocates of a classical curriculum believe that every normal child can succeed in a rigorous, more or less standardized curriculum if English teachers are knowledgeable in their disciplines and sufficiently willing to engage students in intellectual discourse.

Of course, there is more complexity in process views and traditional views of curriculum than there is space to describe here. Since the approach here to delineating content will be quite different, it is recommended that readers interested in classical curricula read works by Adler (1982), Fancher (1984), and Hirsch (1985). For an essentially process-based program fleshed out in terms terms of sample content and appropriate methodology, see Moffett and Wagner (1983).

Content of the Literature Program

Discussion of content of the English curriculum begins with literature, partly because it is the one area in which there is almost unanimous agreement on two points: (a) it is a body of knowledge--i.e., a content area; and (b) literatures as content has a place in the English curriculum. Composition, language, and other matters will be discussed later. The model in Figure III-3 represents all literature that I believe should be eligible for inclusion in the English language arts curriculum.

"Literature" is defined broadly here to include magazines as well as books; expository writing as well as poetry, the novel, drama, and the other genres usually called "creative." Some commonsense exclusions from literature that is eligible for school programs are in order--e.g., expository writings such as corporation reports to stockholders (and most other adult technical documents); pornography outright, in whatever literary medium. There is not sufficient space in this essay to explore interesting questions such as the nature of literary genres or the boundaries of pornography. Suffice it to say that in outline, the universe of school literature should include a wide range of literature for children, young adults, and adults in a variety of print formats.

As the dotted lines suggest, distinctions between the literatures noted in Figure III-3's model are by no means absolute. Robert Cormier's excellent story, "Guess What? I Almost Kissed My Father Last Night," can be read with

interest by adults and teenagers alike. Saint Exupéry's "The Little Prince" and Shel Silverstein's poetry cut across all age levels.

Few would quarrel with such an analysis. Questions of the quality of works eligible for inclusion in English curricula are more difficult. The expanded model (Figure III-4) deals with qualitative questions by placing popular literature within the program (upper left quadrant) along with great classical and contemporary literature (upper right quadrant) and the average-quality literature (bottom half) that comprises most of the works from which teachers and textbook writers might normally select materials for study.

The division into segments in Figure III-4 is not intended to represent recommended proportions of popular, average, and great literature in the English curriculum. The essential point is that materials representing a wide range of quality should be eligible for inclusion in literature programs and available to English teachers. Later it will be argued that different students will require different selections from the total pool of eligible kinds of literature and from literatures of varying quality.

Neither specialists nor laypersons have problems in distinguishing between materials in the upper quadrants of the model, i.e., between the worst and the best. We instantly recognize differences between a pulp magazine love story and Wuthering Heights; hence, the solid line between popular literature and great classical and contemporary literature. Things are less clear, though, at the other borderlines of quality. Most Gothic romance series and popular astrology books are surely in the popular category, but a potboiler novelist or a playwright like Neil Simon will straddle the line between fluff and good literature. Similarly, the line between good and great literature is highly debatable. It might be said that Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms is a great novel, but For Whom the Bell Tolls is merely excellent. English teachers would argue about all of these borderline categorizations, but that is the point. The lines of demarcation will be fuzzy in many judgments about quality.

Even after acknowledging such ambiguities, though, most teachers would agree that some great works drawn from children's literature, young adult literature, and adult literature should be part of every K-12 English curriculum. Most would also acknowledge the necessity of drawing from a wide pool of average-to-good literature. The real controversies are centered on two ideas: (a) the belief that popular literature--from pop/rock lyrics to flimsy adolescent novels to gimmicky chose-your-own-plot adventure books--can play a useful role in school programs; and (b) the notion that literature study should essentially be the study of great works. These questions will be dealt with as problems of cultivation and carryover. A solution may lie in connecting the world of the student with the world of ideas.

Popular literature was in greatest vogue in our schools during the neoprogressive movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The buzzword "relevancy" was often invoked uncritically to sweep vast amounts of bad popular literature into English classes. The reading of trivial materials

FIGURE 3

Literature for the English Language Arts Curriculum

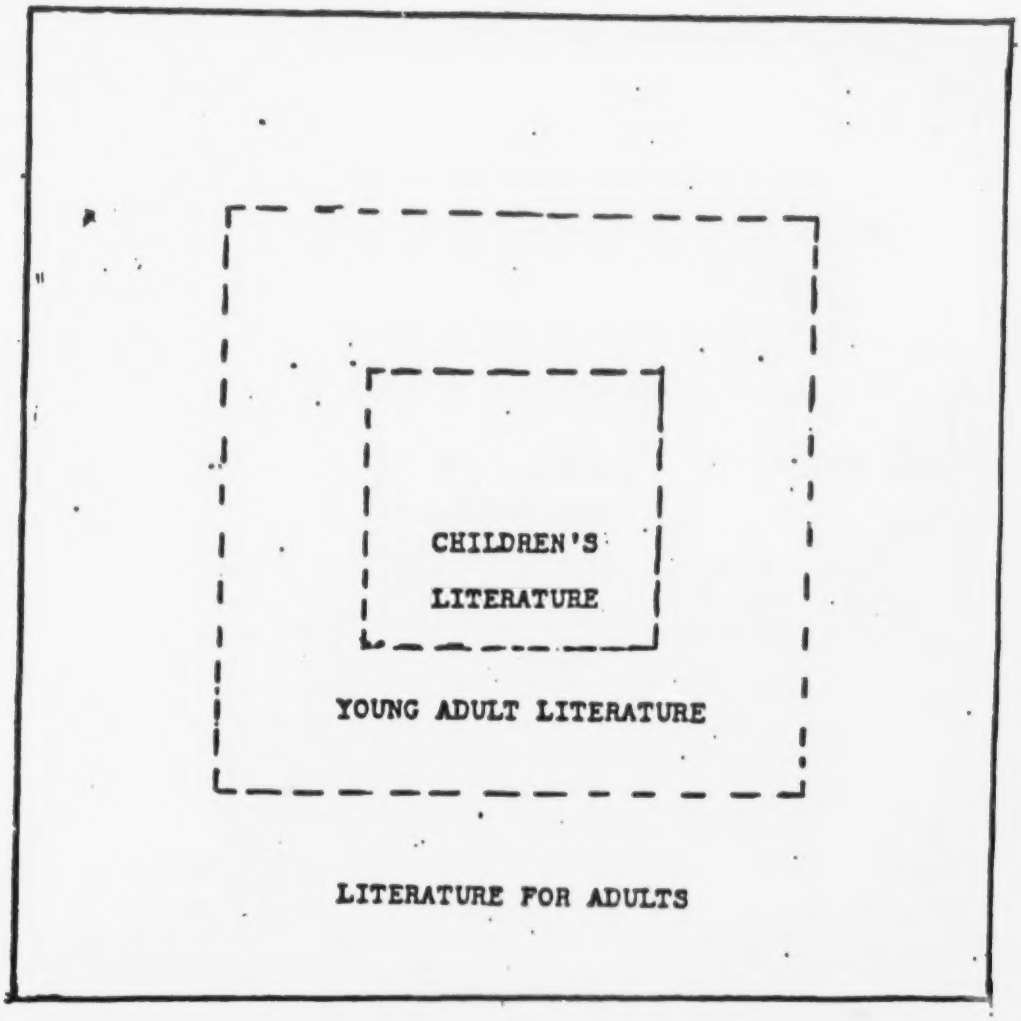
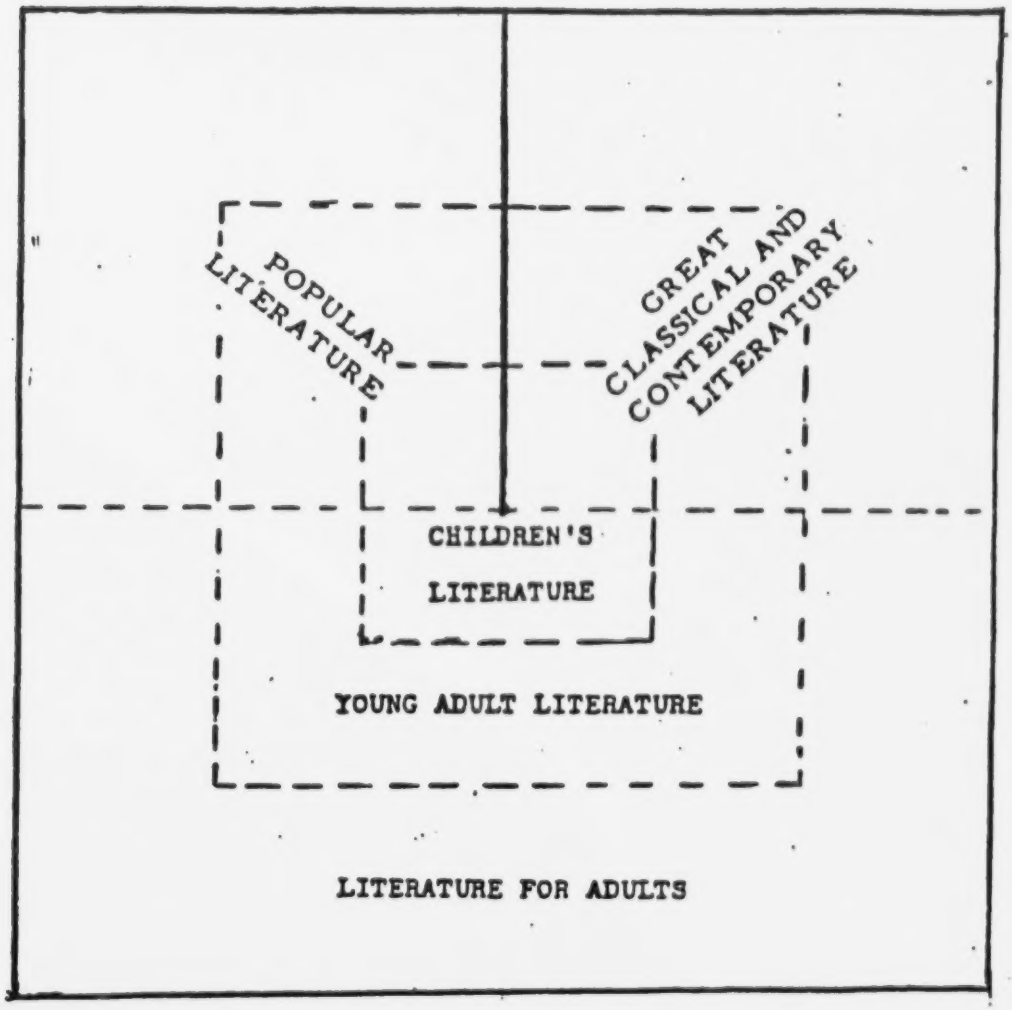


FIGURE 4

Quality of Literary Works for English Curricula



became common, even normative, as educational programs catered to the undeveloped tastes of students. The goal of cultivating students' responses to literature was frequently ignored.

At the other end of the scale, literature programs that draw predominantly on classics and other excellent works do indeed assure that students will have a certain amount of exposure to important works. But these programs rarely succeed in making students into lifelong readers of fine literature. Even when standard works like Silas Marner, Julius Caesar, and David Copperfield are brilliantly taught, most students are not inspired to go out and read, on their own, The Mill on the Floss, King Lear, and Bleak House. The essential element of carryover into personal reading simply has not been effected in the classics-based program.

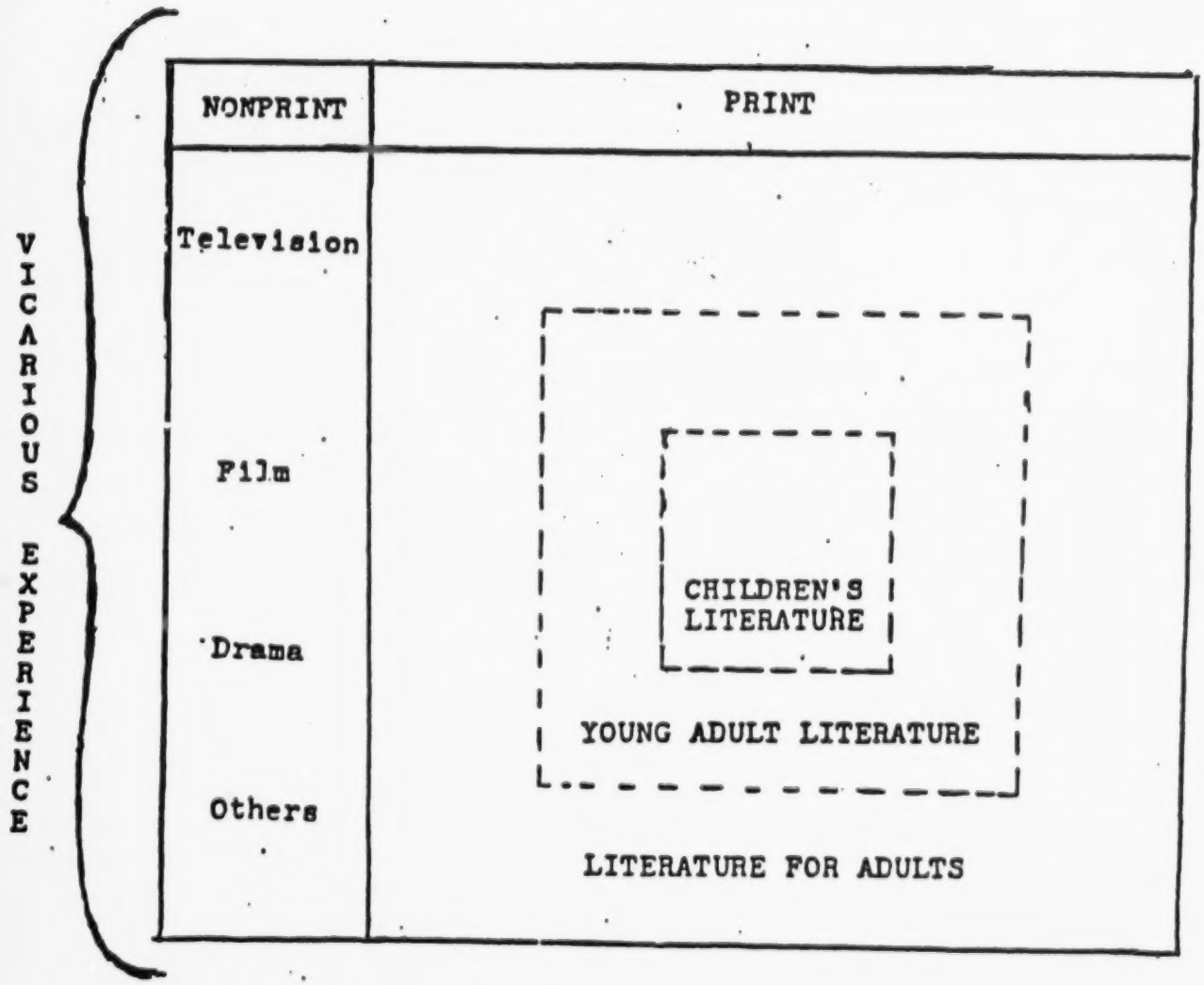
What kind of literature program reckons with the need for cultivation and carryover? The term "cultivation" is relative, implying a nurturing process in which students' intellectual and emotional responses are advanced methodically, in accordance with their present state of growth. If cultivation is to go beyond mere exposure to culture, the teacher must find vital points of connection between the personal world of the student and the larger world of vicarious experience. For tens of thousands of reluctant readers, teen romances or adventure paperbacks are potentially the first point of personal engagement with printed-word narratives. Happily, many other students will enter the world of ideas through more richly organized works such as the poetry of May Swenson or the novels of Paul Zindel. A few come to school with the readiness to devour the great works that we wish everyone could read with relish. The literature program suggested in Figure III-4 permits teachers to seek out, for each student, a door into the world of ideas that the student will willingly enter. It includes exposure to some great works--presumably, those most accessible to contemporary students--but provides a usable framework for connections and carryover.

Cultivation must be consciously pursued if the teacher is to avoid simply running in place with students' present reading habits. To carry the litany of "C's" one step further, a "cut-above" strategy is necessary. That is, students who enjoy sports magazines can be led to read materials that are a cut above their present tastes--simple short stories and poems about athletes. From there, the connection can be made to biographies and autobiographies like those of Wilma Rudolph, and a knowledgeable teacher can then engineer the move to excellent works like Shaw's "The Eighty-Yard Run" or Malamud's The Natural. When the level of engagement is high,the chances of carryover into lifelong reading are much greater. Moreover, the teacher need not neglect the traditions of literary study during the nurturing process. Concepts such as setting, characterization, and plot development can be learned through the study of young adult literature as well as through classic works.

Obviously, a K-12 literature program geared towards student growth will not include a forced march through a set canon of works which every student must read at any given grade level. The teacher must in fact be familiar with a wide range of literature, from classics to currently popular materials. Equally important, the teacher must have the freedom and the insight to apply

FIGURE 5

Print and Nonprint Vicarious Experience



that knowledge in connecting the student with appropriate works, in further cultivating the student's responses, and in encouraging carryover into lifelong reading habits by suggesting materials for leisure reading.

Earlier, literature was referred to as "vicarious experience"--that is experience acquired not by direct interaction with the world but by imaginative entry into worlds created by others. Unfortunately, students today have their most frequent vicarious experiences not through print but through nonprint media--especially television, film, and popular song lyrics.

There is nothing inherently shabby in nonprint vicarious experiences. Some of the greatest expressions of the human spirit, from ancient times to the present, have been achieved through the medium of drama--and of course, drama is a long-established part of the English program. But in America we are besieged and benumbed by television, and vicarious experiences of a low quality are transmitted into our homes on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, both print and nonprint vicarious experiences are included in Figure III-5's diagram of the content of the English curriculum. This is not to say that everything on television or every film is or should be an object of study. Again, the question is what should be eligible for inclusion. And nonprint media are included because the English teacher has an important stake in guiding students' understanding of the imaginative worlds presented in nonprint media.

It was suggested earlier that many nonprint materials have important points in common with established aspects of the literature program. Television sitcoms and feature films have some structural qualities that are found with drama, short stories, and novels. Popular songs have elements in common with folk ballads and lyric poetry. To some extent, similar tools of analysis can be applied to a TV drama, a film, and a narrative in print.

Granted, a great deal of deserved contempt has been heaped upon commercial television. But in complaining about the ill effects of TV on children, educators have largely ignored the potential for making positive use of its many flaws and few virtues. To begin with, reluctant readers are seldom reluctant viewers. A common experience exists for cultivation of taste through critical discussion and analysis. Lehr (1986) has summarized some of the complexities not usually recognized in discussions of the effects of television, noting that numerous possibilities for creative critiques of television have ben insufficiently explored. Teachers might conduct in-class critical comparisons and analyses of popular shows; provide advance preparation for high quality TV dramas; link popular television shows with popular literature that is a cut above the TV experience; apply appropriate terms from literary analysis in discussing television; and teach about stereotypes, slanted observation and reporting, sound inference, and logical argumentation. The student who comes to realize that characterization and exploration of issues in, say, Cagney and Lacey, are more subtle than those elements in stock TV detective shows is better prepared to discuss character and theme in short stories by Hemingway and O. Henry. Facile discussions about the narcotic effects of television overlook the development of a productive critique of television within the English curriculum.

Personal Experience as Content

The content of the English curriculum was earlier described as " that which is to be processed." The view of literary content presented above differs from many traditional views in the acknowledgment of a wide qualitative range and in the inclusion of nonprint media as part of the student's vicarious experiences. A point was also made about connecting literature with the student's personal experiences: if class discussion and writing focus wholly on literary experiences, the links between literature and the life experiences of the student are neglected. Of equal importance is the fact that the student's personal experiences can take on meaning through oral and written language in the classroom, even when those experiences are not linked with iterature. It seems to follow, then, that much of the student's store of personal experience is part of "that which is to be processed"--part of the content of the English program (Figure III-6).

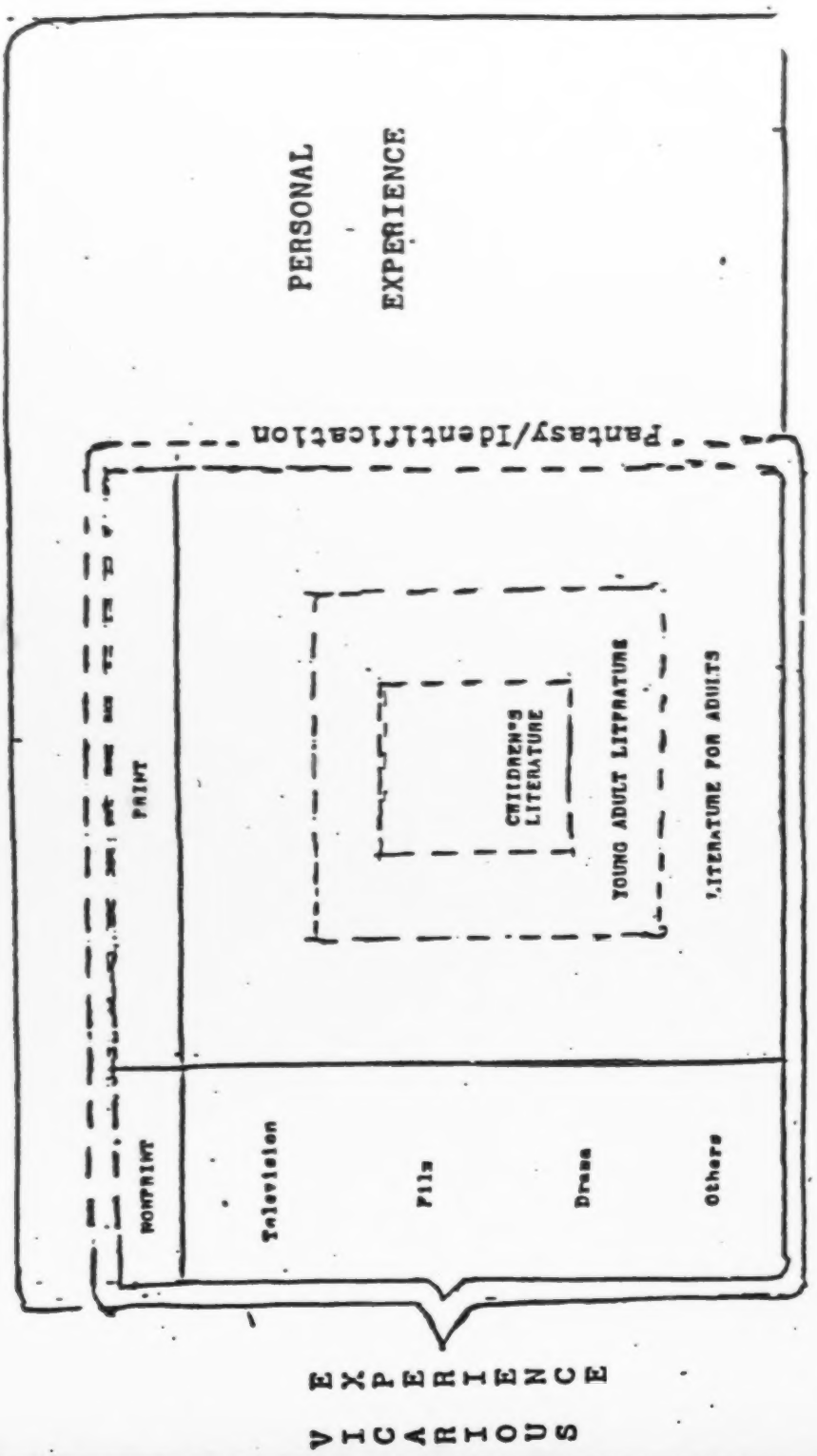
To some extent, Figure III-6 depicts processes as well as content. The dotted lines between personal and vicarious experiences suggest a constant interaction between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1978). "Fantasy" and "identification" are depicted as mental processes vitally linked with vicarious experience. Fantasy is a kind of internal vicarious event through which we imagine ourselves doing things we have not yet done, might do, or indeed cannot do. Identification is a process through which we enter into print and nonprint vicarious experiences. We connect ourselves with the imagined people and events and with the ideas and feelings presented in stories, essays, poems, films, and the like.

Figure III-6 suggests, then, that vicarious experiences can be processed as objects of study and also in relation to students' personal experiences. Students enter imaginatively into the authors' worlds for purposes ranging from analysis to sheer entertainment to the testing of their sense of reality. But Figure III-6 advances the broader point that student' personal experiences are themselves an important part of the content of English. Through the processes of speaking and writing in the classroom, students give clearer shape to the unexamined experiences in their own lives, and they assign significance to those experiences in the very act of processing them. "Connecting" comes to play in a new sense here. Not only are students linked with the minds and emotions of authors; they are also put in touch with their own ideas and feelings, because the processing of personal experiences through language gives clearer form to their impressions of the world.

This is not to say that every private cranny of the student's life and personal values should be drawn out in the classroom and made explicit through discussion and writing. But English is clearly the subject area in which major responsibility is assigned for helping students to be effective users of language. In the English classroom, the process of exploring and clarifying thoughts and feelings through language must be practiced and modeled so that students can become articulate both in interpreting vicarious experience and in expressing their inner states.

FIGURE 6

Role of Students' Personal Experience



Information as Content

Information was overplayed in English curricula of the past. Students were expected to know (i.e., memorize) information about authors' lives, particular works, literary movements, figures of speech, metric patterns, and so on. The questions in textbooks after literary selections rarely stressed higher order thinking skills or dealt with students' responses to characters and events in a work. As noted before, information about grammar was incorrectly thought to be essential to improvement of speaking and writing. Definitions and terminologies--from diphthongs to absolute phrases to nonrestrictive clauses--abounded in school grammar programs. Language textbooks, far from encouraging students to actually use language, were filled with definitions and follow-up drills that required identifying sentence parts and filling in blanks.

Reactions against such programs have justifiably resulted in emphasis on engaging students in actual processes of language-making. Yet it is clear that some information is essential, both in the study of literature as content and in the effective implementation of process-based instruction. Figure III-7 completes the graphic depiction of the content of English by acknowledging the place of information in English curricula.

The final model suggests that students need information in order to discuss initially, and to gain deeper understanding of, their personal and vicarious experiences. Also, information can be often taught through Socratic questioning rather than through assignment for memorization. Many literary concepts--e.g., narrative/lyric poetry, interior monologue, and point of view--are especially teachable through teacher-led inductive and deductive discussion. Certain concepts related to process instruction in oral and written language can also be taught Socratically--e.g., transitional phrases, use of active/passive verbs, and methods of developing a point of argument.

But surely some information is taught most economically through direct methods. For example, the inductive teaching of metric patterns in poetry or a Socratic approach to studying the rules for quotation marks might be needlessly protracted, and ultimately unrewarding for both teacher and student.

In this model, information is primarily a tool rather than an end in itself. As an aspect of content, information is important insofar as it either (a) helps teachers and students talk more readily about other aspects of content, or (b) makes discussion and implementation of processes easier and more fluid. Graphically, information underlies the English program and is not at the center of it. It is a relatively small yet essential support system for the exploration of personal and vicarious experiences through language.

Those who would banish information from the English curriculum, like those who would outlaw drill, take their positions ideologically. There is no research basis for doing so. But they are in part reacting against a sad history of factmongering in English curricula in elementary and secondary schools. Teachers and curriculum developers should indeed guard against the

FIGURE 7

The Place of Information in English Curricula

persisting instinct to consider English as a conglomerate of interesting facts about literature, grammar, and composition.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a view of the content of the English curriculum but it must conclude with a reaffirmation of the process-content relationship. Its view of content, especially the dimension of personal experience, does not make sense unless content is understood in relation to process. Again, the content of English is "that which is to be processed."

English as a subject has identifiable content, but the goals of K-12 instruction require the selection of appropriate materials and the processing of those materials via oral and written language. Dixon (1967) sees English as the ordering of personal and vicarious experience through language. Information is an essential but limited tool in the study of English. Within a far narrower range than was previously thought--a range that still lacks precise definition--there is a body of information that can illuminate content and lubricate process instruction in English. By contrast, the range of usable content in the literature program is wider than was once specified, embracing study of some great works but emphasizing literary experiences that will engage student's interests, cultivate their responses, and promote habits of lifelong reading.

The central job of the English teacher is to induce from students language that helps them to shape and give meaning to their personal experiences and the experiences of others--others whom they meet in the real world and in the imagined worlds of literature. It follows that the test of student growth in English can never be reduced to demonstrating knowledge of content. Students "know English" only when they "do" English well--stating significant ideas clearly in discussions, writing with verve and grace, reading with insight and enjoyment. Finally, students "do" English well when they carry these processes beyond the classroom and continue to grapple with more complex materials and ideas. Ultimately, the English curriculum is successful only when students read, speak, and write well in the worlds they inhabit subsequent to their K-12 educational experiences.

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